NO 3

No. 22.

On Amenorrhœa

by Robt. G. Mosely of Virg.a

passed March 13. 1816

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Amenorrhoea.

The subject of my thesis is by no means a new one; like every other disease to which the human body is subject, amenorrhoea has been the object of research among men of talents, from the dawn of medical science to the present day; while such distinguished characters as appeared at different times, have devoted much attention to the investigation of this disease, it cannot be expected that I should here offer more than a series of quotations; nevertheless, I may without presumption hope to

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Amenorrhoea being a disease peculiar to the female sex, on whom we are dependant for the greater portion of our earthly happiness, renders it doubly interesting to the medical world: as civilization progresses and the sources of luxury became more abundant, so in proportion will be the frequency of disease; for we find among the antediluvians, life was prolonged to seven, eight, and even nine hundred years; from this we are led to conclude that diseases of a malignant nature were scarcely known among them; but as civilization advanced disease not only became more frequent, but assumed a more malignant form, which has continued more or less to the present day.

That amenorrhoea is a disease arising out of, or at least aggravated by luxury and sedentary habits, will I think be sufficiently evinced by turning our attention for a moment to the savages that inhabit new over country; here we find the females leading an active

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life, indulging in none of the luxuries of art, but their food consisting of nature's bounty, which wise providence directs them to such articles as shall satisfy the demands of nature, without leaving behind them such latent poison as results from the use of our wine, and other luxuries prepared by art. While then diseases (among which dementia has been considered the most formidable) are, by their ravages severing the affectionate wife from the bosom of her husband, and consigning her to the horrors of an untimely grave; we should by unwearied exertions endeavour by the virtue of the healing art, to arrest the progress of disease, and restore to the embraces of the husband, and the cares of their tender offspring, the object of adoration to the former, and a benefactor to the latter.

Not having experience to guide, nor the advantages of age to direct me, I have instead of wandering in the speculative fields of imagination, confined my few observations within the precincts of well attested facts, that basis on which we should found our theories and direct our

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Medical men have in all ages been fond of speculative theories: this has not only produced discord among themselves, but in many instances lured the student from the pleasing paths of truth, and involved him in the mist of obscurity and clouds of ignorance. Speculative theories therefore should be advanced, and received with extreme caution; nevertheless we find advocates for theories which carry with them within truth or reason. I wish here not to be misunderstood as wholly disapproving of theoretical views, for they are indispensable in the present imperfect state of our knowledge founded on physical facts; but I hope the time is not far distant, when the necessity for speculation shall cease, and when the healing art shall triumph over every disease to which the human species are at this time subject: nay, may we not with confidence adopt the language of the immortal Rush and say, that the time will arrive, when from the perfection of our science we shall be enabled by the virtue of the healing art to effect cures equally great with

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In treating of Amenorrhoea, I design to make a few remarks on healthy menstruation — its most probable cause — the effect and changes in the female constitution which generally precede the first menstruation; after which, I shall proceed to speak of the nature — causes — and treatment of the disease. First then of menstruation.

By menstruation we are to understand a periodical discharge from the unimpregnated uterus of all healthy women, consisting of a fluid as will be hereafter shown differing in many respects from pure blood. This opinion is by no means universal, for we find even among physiologist of the present days some who suppose the menstrual fluid to consist of pure blood discharged from the extremities of the uterine arteries.

Menstruation for the first time is generally preceded by a slight indisposition, such as pain in the back, and

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inferior extremities, accompanied with various hysterical and nervous affections: but as the menses make their appearance, these symptoms for the most part gradually subside, while in some women they return with considerable violence at every period of menstruation during life.

The quantity discharged at each healthy menstruation depends in a great measure on the constitution and habits of the woman: the average quantity however, will be found not to exceed four or six ounces; there is also considerable difference in the time required for the completion of each menstruation, and the space which elapses between each menstrual period; with some women menstruation is effected in a few hours, while others menstruate for many days; from three to six days is however the most usual time required for the completion of the process. A lunar month or twenty nine days is generally the time which elapses between each period of menstruation; this however, is influenced by climate, difference in constitution, and a variety of other causes.

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irregular, returning at protracted intervals and in larger quantities; at length they disappear altogether.

It not unfrequently terminates in copious haemorrhage from the uterus, nose, or lungs, destroying the patient sometimes in a few hours: tumors which have remained a long time inactive are peculiarly disposed at this time to terminate in true cancer; in some instances however, the constitution is much improved, more especially in delicate women, and such as menstruate too copiously.

The time at which the menses disappear has justly been considered the most critical period of a womans life, as she is at this time particularly liable to certain diseases, as Consumption, Dropsy &c: whether these are produced in consequence of the cessation of a long continued drain, or the changes effected in the uterus itself, I am not prepared to say.

There have been different ideas entertained respecting the cause of menstruation, and the nature of the fluid discharged. The ingenious Mr Hunter who laboriously experimented on the blood, is supposed to have been among the first, who suggested the idea

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that menstruation was performed by a process similar to secretion, and the fluid discharged to differ in many essential points from pure blood taken from the arm while the woman was menstruating: but the indefatigable labours of Professor Chapman who has thrown light on many important branches of medical science, investigated this subject more minutely, and has I think incontestably proven that menstruation depends wholly upon a secretory action of the uterus: this he infers from the following well attested facts;

1st That the uterus in its villus and vascular structure resembles a gland, and also in its diseases being alike subject to scirrhus cancer &c.

2nd That like other secretory organs, blood is copiously diffused through it.

3rd. That in common with other secretions menstruation is at first imperfectly performed, and is subject afterwards to vitiation and derangement. In the beginning the discharge is commonly thin, colourless, and deficient, and occurs at protracted and irregular

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intervals. In some of these particulars it is analagous to the seminal secretion.

4th That when the menses are suppressed they cannot be restored by inducing plethora, nor the flow checked by bloodletting or any other means of depletion: Beside no vicarious discharge relieves the symptoms of suppression Do not these facts unequivocally proclaim the existence of a secretory function?,,

The changes effected in the female constitution previous to their first menstruating, is eloquently described by Doctor Denman in his system of Midwifery,, Their complexion is improved, their countenance is more expressive and animated, their attitudes graceful and their conversation more intelligent and agreeable, the tone of their voice becomes more harmonious, their whole frame, but particularly their breasts are expanded and enlarged, and their minds are no longer engaged in childish pursuits and amusements: to this I would add, that the pelvis is enlarged and the uterus acquires its adult form. Menstruation now commences, and the

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By amenorrhoea we are to understand a total absence of the menses from other causes than conception or lactation; while either of these processes are going on no effect whatever results in consequence of their absence; but on the contrary should the menses be obstructed from other causes, a train of unpleasant symptoms ensue, which if not arrested sooner or later terminates in death.

This disease has been by most writers divided into Retention, and Suppression of the menses: by the former, we understand, that the menses from same cause do not appear at the usual period of life: and by the latter when the menses have been regularly established, they cease to return at their usual periods from other causes than conception or lactation.

In speaking of the treatment of amenorrhoea I shall in a great manner, blend the two divisions together, as it would

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Chlorosis necessarily has to a repetition and lengthy description of the symptoms, causes &c of each separately; which I consider in a practical point of view as useless and unnecessary; I shall however, mention cursorily some of the most prominent symptoms which characterize that stage of retention commonly called Chlorosis. These are, indisposition to move, great fatigue on the least exercise, pain in the back and inferior extremities, flatulence and acidity in the stomach, with many other symptoms of dyspepsia. As the disease advances, the lips loose their colour, the eyes are encircled with a livid areola; the face assumes a yellow hue, and the whole body has a leucophlegmatic appearance, with an evident want of energy in the constitution. This stage of the disease has frequently been mistaken for jaundice, from which it may readily be distinguished by attending to the following particulars; in jaundice, the urine is generally high coloured and deposits considerable sediment, the tunica conjunctiva assumes a dull yellow colour; whereas in chlorosis, the urine is pale and almost limpid, the eye

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The causes which may occasion suppression of the menses, are; the sudden application of cold, sitting in damp rooms especially during the time of menstruating, certain passions of the mind, such as fear, excessive joy &c. Suppression frequently depends on the formation of an organized substance within the cavity of the uterus not unlike the membrana decidua: and is also symptomatic of other diseases, more especially those of the ovaries. Dr. Cullen supposes Amenorrhoea to depend more frequently on this cause, than any other which has been assigned.

We have at length arrived to the most important part of the subject before us, namely, the application of medicines to the cure of Amenorrhoea. Futile indeed would be the attempt, to enumerate the different opinions which exists among medical men respecting the causes and treatment of this disease; neither would the

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narrow limits of these pages suffer me to extend my observations to such lengths; I shall therefore content myself by offering that mode of treatment, which has proved most successfull; at the same time apprising the reader that he will not meet with success in every instance; but prepare himself for occasional disappointments after exercising his skill and judgment, to the greatest possible advantage.

At the head of the remedies in the treatment of amenorrhoea, I do not hesitate to place the Polygala Senega: there is however some discrimination necessary in the exhibition of this powerfull medicine: when there is considerable activity in the arterial system, venesection must be resorted to; for so long as the pulse remains active our medicine instead of proving beneficial, is sometimes highly detrimental: after reducing the system to the proper point, the polygala is an invaluable medicine.

The Senega under proper circumstances is advantageously employed in all cases of amenorrhoea, but more especially

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There is no medicine in my opinion which acts more specifically on any part of the human body, than the Senega does on the uterus; for which reason, it is eminently adapted to rouse that organ into action requisite to the expulsion of any foreign substance which may exist within its cavity.

Doctor Hartshorn is entitled to the honour of first employing the Polygala Senega in amenorrhoea; since which time its virtue has been fully established by Professor Chapman, and the concurring testimony of many others; the experience of Professor Chapman induces him to speak in the highest terms of this article: he says the most efficacious mode of exhibiting the medicine, is in the form of a decoction, prepared by adding a pint of boiling water to an ounce of the bruised root in a close vessel, and simmering over the fire slowly untill the quantity is reduced two thirds,

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of this, four ounces may be taken in the twenty four hours. When the medicine excites nausea which it is some times apt to do even in small quantities, some aromatic should be added. At the time when the menstrual effort is expected, and till the discharge is actually induced the quantity should be increased as far as the stomach will bear without inducing vomiting: in the intervals of the menstrual periods, the medicine should be laid aside for a week or two, as by its constant use the efficacy of the medicine is somewhat lost, and it becomes nauseous and disgusting to the patient.

While the patient is under the influence of this medicine, the system should be well regulated by the use of appropriate remedies, that is to says should the patient be labouring under debility; wine, tonics, and a nourishing diet, should be given her: and on the contrary, where there is considerable excitement, venesection, and active cathartics must be resorted to. the latter however is preferable as it serves to derive the primae via and determine the fluids to the inferior extremities.

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As a further confirmation of the efficacy of this medicine in the cure of amenorrhoea; I will relate the particulars of a case which came under my observation not long since; early last spring I visited a servant girl aged nineteen years, who had laboured under an obstinate amenorrhoea of nine months standing; she was much emaciated in consequence of the length of time she had laboured under the disease, and the improper treatment she had received from the physician attending her, who had mistaken the disease for that of hydrothorax, of which there were several symptoms.

On my seeing her I enquired whether she menstruated; and was informed, as before stated, that the menses had been suppressed for nine months, previous to which time she had enjoyed almost uninterrupted health; this induced me to suspect that the symptoms of water in the chest proceeded from the suppressed catamenia, and was only symptomatic of that disease; under these impressions I directed the patient wine, tonics, and a nourishing diet with a view of increasing her strength, and

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imparting vigour to the constitution; this treatment was continued for several weeks in which time her general health was so much improved as to justify the use of the Senega: I accordingly gave her three ounces of the decoction every twenty four hours for five days; she now complained of pain in her back and ~~inferior extremities~~ region of the uterus; these symptoms I considered as indicative of the menstrual effort; the medicine was now increased to an ounce every two hours; this however proved ineffectual. The medicine was now discontinued for near three weeks, during which time I put her on the same plan of treatment as in the first instance, with the addition of exercise, which she was unable to take when I first saw her: at the expiration of this time I again resumed the use of the Senega, and in three days the menstrual effort was again made, and crowned with success: she has continued to menstruate regularly, every symptom of hydrothorax entirely disappeared, and her health was in every respect completely established.

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are indebted for many useful, and important improvements in the science of medicine, but more especially for his accurate investigation of the medicinal properties of certain Vegetables, has spoken in the highest terms of the Rubia Tinctorum both in retention an suppression of the menses. Whether this medicine acts specifically on the uterus or not; I am unprepared to say; but of its efficacy in amenorrhoea there can be no doubt. I have witnessed its virtue in a variety of cases in the Philadelphia Alms House during my attendance as a Student last Summer; to avoid prolixity in recounting the practice I witnessed in that institution, I beg indulgence while I relate the particulars of an interesting case of a poor girl, aged twenty years whom I attended in this city: She had laboured under a suppression of the menses for near six months.

When I first saw this patient, she complained of an acute pain in the right hypochondriac region, Vertigo and considerable debility; under the existing circumstances the use of the lancet was forbade, for which I substituted

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a blister directly on the seat of the pain, and gave her a gentle cathartic. On my next visit which was the succeeding day, I found the violence of the pain much mitigated, and her head considerably clear: I now ordered thirty grains of the Tartar tartarum to be given her twice a day; this I continued for five days without any evident impression being made on the uterus, her health however in other respects was much improved. The medicine was now discontinued for three weeks, during which time she took moderate exercise, made use of a generous diet, with an occasional use of wine: the medicine was again resumed, and the dose increased to forty grains; at the expiration of three days, she complained of pain in the back and region of the uterus, warm flannel was now applied directly over that organ, and in twenty four hours the menses began to flow; but with considerable pain. I directed her to make use of pediluvium, and take a few doses of the medicine a day or two before the next period of menstruation: this she did, and menstruated with considerable ease.

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Juniperus Sabina. This medicine in the dose of ten or fifteen grains, is a powerful and difficult stimulus, and is supposed to exert cumulative influence on the uterus: It may be advantageously used in cases of amenorrhoea dependent on debility of that organ: should the medicine affect the bowels, which it is sometimes apt to do even in the smallest doses, we should either desist from its use a few days, or combine with it a small quantity of opium.

Rosmarinus Officinalis. This is a very popular medicine among old women and nurses, and no doubt may sometimes be used with advantage. The most efficacious mode of exhibiting this medicine, is in the form of tea, of which the patient should drink half a pint when going to bed for three or four nights and then intermitting.

Helleborus niger. This medicine had long been used as an emmenagogue, but the scepticism of Cullen causing him to doubt its efficacy, the medicine was for a while abandoned as wholly inert; the recent experiments however of Mead and others, fully establish its virtue as an emmenagogue. The helleborus niger was

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found by these gentlemen to be peculiarly adapted to those cases of Amenorrhoea which are accompanied or produced by constipation of the bowels: Here I shall digress somewhat from the subject, and enquire into the probability of Amenorrhoea frequently depending on a collection of crude feculent matter within the larger intestines, but more especially the Colon.

Females in general are of a delicate constitution, and their avocations for the most part sedentary; hence costiveness must necessarily be more frequent among them than any other class of society. The alvine evacuation is periodical, and very much under the influence of habit. in consequence of false delicacy and peculiar situations, the regular calls of nature are neglected from time to time, until habitual costiveness is the necessary consequence. - The capacity of the pelvis being large, a quantity of feculent matter is retained in the Colon, and other large intestines, which pressing against the uterus, ovaries, and their blood vessels, debilitate those organs, thereby producing irregular action, and consequently Amenorrhoea: that this is a conjecture founded on

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plausible reason, may I think be inferred from the symptoms which frequently precede a suppression of the menses: The bowels became more or less constipated, and eructations from the stomach, tension, and frequently pain about the hypogastric region, and not unfrequently a periodical pain of the head evidently proceeding from the diseased state of the stomach and alimentary canal: whether these conjectures be correct or not, certain it is that cathartics are eminently serviceable in many cases of amenorrhoea, and I presume the emmenagogue virtue of the hellebore niger to depend principally upon its property as a cathartic: here it may be asked, why other cathartics do not answer the same purpose? To this I would answer, that the virtue of a medicine depends in a great measure upon the relation which may exist between that medicine, and the part of the human system diseased, or in other words, its specific operation on that part.

The specific operations of medicines is by no means a new doctrine, yet its existence is by many doubted, and by others wholly denyed, it is not my intention here to

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Secale Cornutum This is a late addition to the materia medica, and consequently its virtues not fully known to us. It was first employed with a view of expediting parturition, when the uterus was in an atonic state, and also for the purpose of restraining hemorrhage which sometimes succeeds parturition.

Its powers on the uterus being fully established by its prompt and decisive influence over that organ in the two preceding affections; the attention of the faculty became interested in this article as by no means unworthy of trial as an emmenagogue.

Owing to the scarcity of the Ergot, experiments have not been carried to that extent I could wish: from this cause alone ~~have~~ I have been debarred from making a series of experiments ~~relative to its properties as~~ with a view of ascertaining whether it possesses the

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emmenagogue virtue in so eminent a degree; the experiments of my friend Mr. Erskine of Virginia has afforded ample proof of the superior efficacy of this medicine in the treatment of amenorrhoea; he has favoured me with a short detail of a case which he successfully treated with the ergot, and as it may not prove altogether uninteresting I shall take the liberty, by his permission of inserting it in this place. He says "With a view of ascertaining whether the Ergot be possessed of emmenagogue virtues, I selected a patient in the Philadelphia Alms house who had laboured under an obstinate amenorrhoea for upwards of nine months, and had resisted every mode of treatment that was instituted by several of the most eminent practitioners.

After all the medicines which were used with a view of establishing the menstrual discharge had failed, and the case considered as hopeless, I resolved to make trial of the ergot; accordingly at ten o'clock A.M. I administered thirty grains of the Ergot in decoction, repeating the same for three morning in succession

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but on the third day the medicine excited vomiting, which circumstance forced me to desist from its further exhibition in this form; I then prepared three powders ten grains each and directed that she should take them during the day in molasses, but the first of these likewise produced vomiting; I now suspended the use of the ergot for two days, during which time I took the precaution to have her feet bathed in warm water and sinapisms applied, with a view of diverting a violent action which was then going on in the head; this being effected I again had recourse to the Ergot.

At ten o'clock A.M. of the sixth day from the first administration of the medicine, I gave her twenty grains in decoction combined with an aromatic, and in the space of ten minutes it produced pains in the region of the uterus compared by her to after pains, these returned every five or six minutes with increased violence; at thirty minutes past eleven o'clock the discharge was excited. The appearance of the fluid discharged was perfectly natural and continued

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Cathartics. This class of medicines are certainly of the highest importance in the treatment of amenorrhoea, having elsewhere spoken of their modus operandi I shall not again trespass on your patience by a recapitulation here.

The bowels as before suggested are in a torpid state, and as not perform their functions properly, hence to derive the full effect of cathartics in this disease they must be frequently repeated and continued for a considerable length of time. We might be inclined to believe a priori, that extreme debility would be the consequence of this mode of treatment: but from the concurring authority of Doctor Hamilton and Professor Chapman whose experience with this class of medicines is by no means limited, we find that the patients strength so far from being diminished is very considerably increased while under the influence of drastic purgatives at least every third day: the Aloes in combination with Calomel in the proportion of three grains

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of the former to eight of the latter, is the purgative of all others which should be resorted to, not only from the drastic nature of the Aloes, but also on account of its peculiar action on the rectum.

Having completed the consideration of the general remedies I proceed to speak in a cursory manner of local applications; at the head of which, I shall place Blisters: they should be applied on the inner side of each thigh, and directly over the region of the uterus.

Sinapisms to the feet are sometimes found eminently useful, as by their irritation they have a tendency to counteract the too great determination of blood to the head thereby restoring an equilibrium of circulation and inducing healthy action. Pediluvium is sometimes used with the same view; the feet should be immersed in water heated to 90° or 100° of Farenht: and suffered to remain for thirty or forty minutes, after which they should be wiped dry and neatly wrapt in dry flannel.

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discharge has been excited, tonic medicines, such as Peruvian Bark Rubigo Ferri &c: moderate exercise, and a well regulated nutritious diet should be enjoined, as by the neglect of these auxilaries, the disease has returned with redoubled violence, and the unfortunate sufferer after being reclaimed ~~[illegible]~~ from the brink of the grave, through the carelessness or neglect of her physician is precipitately hurled from the stage of life, and consigned to the horrible shades of death.

Finis.